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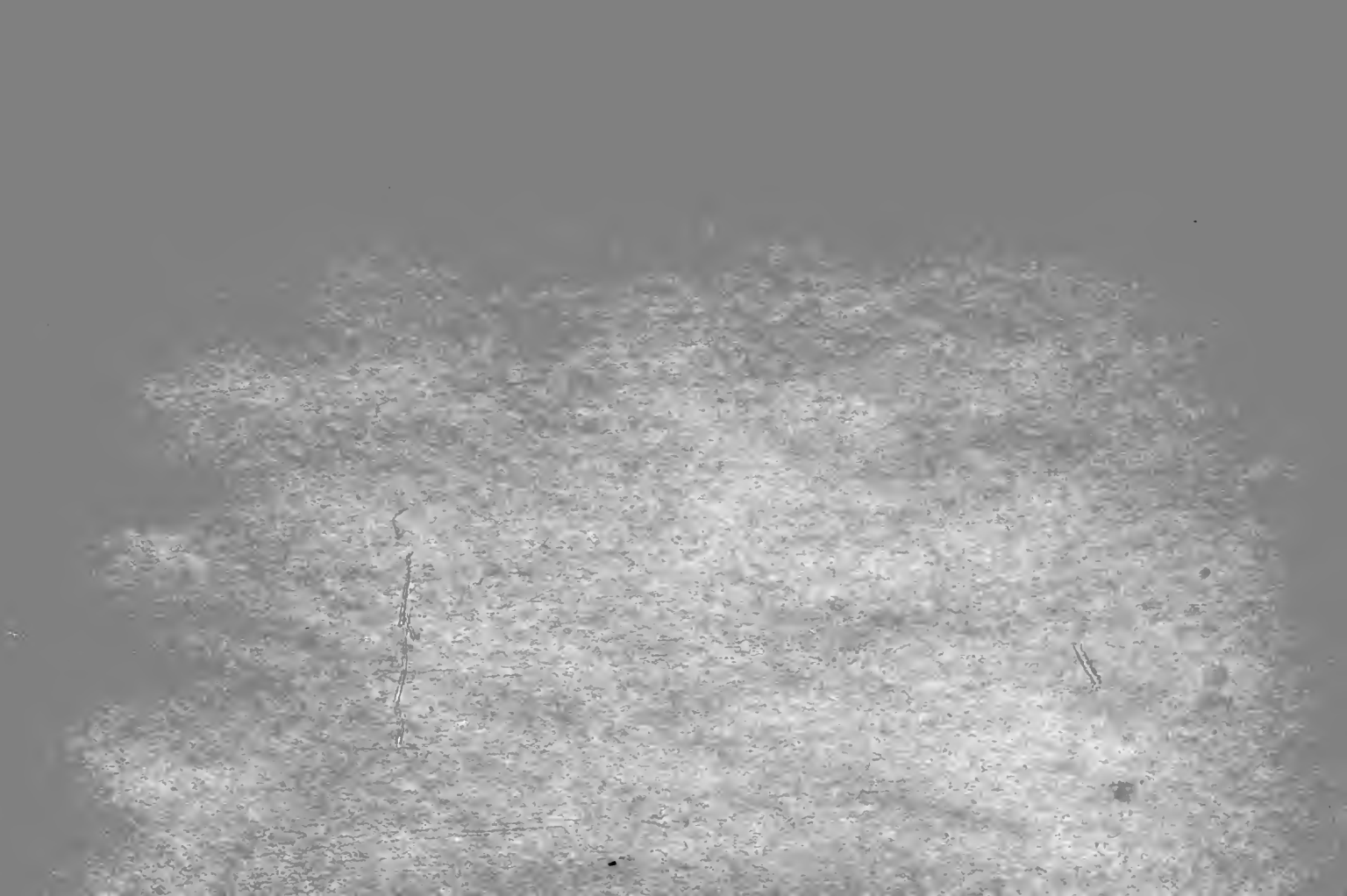

TROLLEY LINES

JOTTED DOWN COMING AN
GOING

BY

ANDREA HOFER PROUDFO

TROLLEY LINES

TROLLEY LINES

JOTTED DOWN COMING AND GOING

BY

ANDREA HOFER PROUDFOOT

RALPH
FLETCHER
SEYMOUR
PUBLISHER
FINE ARTS BUILDING,
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TROLLEY LINES

TROLLEY LINES

WATER FRONT

You, who often lie so still,
Sifting the dense fumes of the city
Into sea-lights and satin edgings—

You, who flick through the spaces,
When from intermittent streets
You call us
With your patches of beauty—

You balmy, crouching blue wonder—

You, who shadow our skyline,
And make it dance like a hoyden;
Snapping its pattern,
Dissolving it back into etchings,
Ragging them with your shore-wash—

You, who laugh in your lakebed
And spread out your body,
Stretching to show us
Your bowelling vastness—

You, the designer
Who stencils our borders
With reaches of freedom,
And dances our shipping on festoons and arches;

You, the singer, to pour out and quicken
Your waters—
In the roar of your beauty
Drink to our City,
Anoint it with willing!

TOGETHER

Let me rather ride,
For when I walk
I meet but fragments
And nomad fancies—
Fragments of bodies
Like dismal wandering accidents
Drifting into tangles.

Let me rather ride
That I may meet men and women together
Drawn in a single direction
To certain landing places;
Let me join in the ride with them,
Even though they drift
Afterward.

THE CONCRETE AGE

When I stay at home
I think of myself;
I find myself planning
For soft bedding neutrals
To tie into eider quilts
To nurse my restless hopes.

When I ride
I think of my brother.
The vivid wire over-crest
Dissolves the cobble stones;
They become one
With my dust.
They become sifted and mixed with doings.

My concrete rides over the concrete
Of the pavement
Over the powdered atoms of the species that were.

When I ride
I am charged with the current of service
Which turns clods to men,
Which turns men into races again—
Races that create the miriad-god—
The god of conrete
Who created me.

WOMAN ALIGHTING

A star, a flame;
A wondering clothed in turns;
A soft-fleshed foot touches the dust;
It grounds the current;
The power-coils of the inter-realms
Start a flow
Through breasts and hair
And parkway grass-splashes.

MAN ALIGHTING

Wresting and springing
Clear of the rail;
One leap to the pavement;
Delighting in himself, the goal;
Then off to the next mounting and overcoming;
On to the fresh arriving—
All lustily attired
For the brunt game.

WHY NOT?

A pair of Maybirds
Would not choose the trolley eaves
For nesting places;
Yet I angle for lines
To weave into thought-containers
In the thudding corner
Of the car,—
Here, where all these overhead currents
Lend me private wires
Into the unreachable.

Over there sits a pinkish pair
With half the passengers before
And half behind;
Deaf and sightless,
Save to each other, they make me see
That only Maybirds have rights,
Only twinning plans have sense,
Only charged beings occupy space,
And songs are not so out of place
As news mongering
On a trolley.

TEXTILE WAYS

Every day
When I get off the bus
I feel as though I'd left
Life's shifting looms behind,
To take up my single thread again.

I untwist;
I ravel myself
Out of the scales of self-mercerization;
I widen out again
Through restful mediums
Into the scope of decorative line,
And primary color
And planes of design;
Then am I ready for the Great Weaver's
Patterns of tomorrow.

WILLOW AND MAHOGANY

Out of the seat beside me
She fluttered,
Covered with slinking silk
And fur-trimmed gauze—thinner than she,
She! The water-blooded jade of decency,
Out of whose veins
The essence of at least four pro-genitors
Had been bleached into aenemia!
She trailed her fashionable figure
And a stream of perfume
Followed her to the car door.

Into the seat
Heavy with work,
Pressed down with bundles,
Came my dusky sister;
Odors of the jungle;
Limbs, like timbers uncut;
Arms, quieted by heavy work;
Skin, hoary with the wait of ages
That would break the bark and build.

SHE STARTED ME ASKING

Were all her goings and comings—like curves?
All her footfalls—like metred lines?
Were all her dinings and sleepings—just make-readies for verses?
Were her housings and clothing—just coverings for more and more poems to escape, from their folds and swathings?
Were her giggles—formless, gurgling rhymes?
Were her turnings and swayings—just part of the flow of a river lyric?
Did her light questions—need sonnets to answer?

At least she started me
Asking all this,
As she mounted the step,
And the folded panel doors unfolded
And snapped her in;
Leaving me on the curb
In the sky-gray evening.

VACUUM

Yes, she was beautiful once;
Yes, she had a lover, too;
Yes, held close little faces;
And more—worked, served, sacrificed.
But where are the traces?

I met her waiting at the corner
As though she had always waited there.
See, how Time's chisel chases
And embosses vibrant links
Set with jewels—jewels of experience—
All in vain,
For there are no traces.

Masks with vacant smiles
Round sight-worn eyes
In sagging faces,
What abhorrent voids you form
In barren places!
Perhaps some day, we'll blast the beaker
Tear the stone away—
We women who bear no traces.

SPRING UNDER THE LIVE WIRE

I looked and saw the blown dust lift
That flew before us as we trolled along;
Its glistening particles rainbowed
As might a mist hung before a sunset.

I guessed some secret stir was in the wind.
The crackle of the current
Slipped into a hum;
The silt came up in waves
Smelling with ground secrets, just unlocked,
Like anions fresh dissolved.

Had the wire felt the thrill of passing thrushes
northbound—
Wild inside with volts of song to flood their mates
As soon as roosts might rest them,
In trees that wooded their long-journeyed dreams?

It seemed as though the whole
Had grounded suddenly through me;
For I tasted the charge between my teeth,
And the world of things went dead
And left my schemes
Like empty dry batteries.

INVISIBLE PASSENGERS

You could fancy
That the goblet of death
Had overflowed for her.

Her eyes seemed looking
Through a gate with questions;
Far away songs swept her with listening.

Her's were untaught eyes and ears
Mysteries were just beginning to open to them
As whenceward they shifted.

Her aimless moves showed untrained fingers;
Could they be feeling
For some vanished pulse?

Locked in the chamber of changelessness
Did she hold some one unforgettable—
Still, secret and silent and hidden?

Was she climbing down through wonder-rounds
To find deep away there in the hold
Her heart's stowaway?

Or was she listening to footsteps
Echoing through the locked canyons of her memory
Ravining and bridging her purposes?

I am sure an invisible passenger
In its over-flight
Was coaxing her to reach into distances.

For she smiled in under-melodies
And did not note the crowd about—
The crowd which hummed bass off the key.

I'M OFF TO TEA

We'll meet
And 'mong the curving silver things
We'll sit, and look into each other's faces,
All framed in oval, cloudy fragrance.
Our fingers will flutter
Up and down with their porcelain bowls
Of steaming Pekoe—
With its familiar body odors
Whiling us to empty raptures.

Laughter, and little flames
Of love-words we'll sip
Into our ears;
And many a far-off look will hang
With fringing memories.
Ah, if a lifetime might be tacked
Into such a satisfying hour!

STARTING FOR THE CAR

At home, and you on the wing!

Against my inner walls
A startled longing beats.
You, out where I can not stretch my hand
And cover you with the brooding robes of care!
You, firstborn from the quivering orifice
Of my love-pollenated soul!
You, that I could kneel over
And libate with my breast's litany!
The thought of whom
Oft turns my muscles into smiles
That break through every move
And give with mighty armfuls
All that I am
To ease your frail falls!

At rest, and you striving there!
Straining all the outer man
To feed the outer—for so 'tis willed!
And here this fecund, fertile, cumulous being,
The storehouse for the strong-limbed races
That shall be—the Woman, sits at home
Streaming with the power to yield—
A parasite, a satellite, a poem.

DISILLUSIONED

We bumped each other
Going round the curve.
It was as though
I put my finger into soft flummery;
Uncertain vague bubbles
Seemed to enfold her
Through the immediate.
Then I realized that I had struck
Something—somewhere, farther down.

Had I touched the inner crust
Which the crude fluxes of the ages
Had hardened into a fixed being—
All the atoms having fit at last?

Would the pryers call it her sub-consciousness?
The prayers describe it as her primitive paganinity?
Her rival name it as ainnate commonness?

We did not call it anything,
But both laughed,
And from that instant
Everything was plain between us;
We could never be deceived
In each other again.

PARALLEL

So many haloes have been thrown at me
To slip over my head
At this game of ring-toss!

There was the youth halo;
The lover-romance halo;
The inebrious halo of piety;
The circlet of young laurel-lives
Woven into the parent halo!

But I've escaped them all.
Yet I've had the lume of it all;
And here I am
Just a little nobody anyhow,
That dares take its lonesome fling
At the Infinite.

I jostle the human bunches—
They do not realize
How sought out I have been
By haloes.
They little dream
When they meet them face to face,
Such wonders of the world.

The conductor charges me
Not a cent more than the rest.
But when I step off the car
The frost of the hand rail
Singes my fingers.
Ha! the Iron has recognized me!
Alas, I am betrayed, for It knows
That my living spark is full of It—
That my currents flow with Its veins
Parallel!

THE SWAMP WITCH

Rolling, rolling avenues of humans!
Seeking the scent—
The blood scent—half way cross the world
They have come,
To jump the claim of the swamp witch.

They squat all over the prairie;
They join their own odors with
The moist odors of smoked flesh,
And a sweetish, half-human,
Half-commercial flavor
Floods the pocked alleys
Where the cow-paths
All lead to one shamble.

Here in huts
Like bargaining prairie dogs
They perch and watch and dodge all day.

Once it was an onion patch—
Shi-ka-go-o—
Mixed with lulling water-lilies
Half the year.
Lolly-fat squaws squatted
On the dry patches

Stewing fish in earthen pots.
We can prove it,
For we're still here who remember.

Now the old wizard—
From whom they ran half way cross the world—
Waves his greedy wand
And they fetch him their bagged plenty
Their clots of honey
Stolen from the witch's comb;
They lend him wampum to buy with;
Their prairie schooners steam up
To carry it to him.—
These rolling, rolling avenues of humans!

But the soul of the old swamp-witch
Still hovers unseen through the smudge,
She hisses mid the overhead lines
She sulks through the sewers
And her clammy claim is unsettled
By its jumpers.

INTERNATIVE

Each one of my trolley songs
Lilts for me fresher
Than the one tripped on the last jog.

Yesterday I met a calico goddess
That shed verses like a moulting fawn;
Today I race home with exploding lips
To tell in a gale of vision
How a bunch of pussywillows
Transplanted the dune waves
To the city,
For me to catch their spray there.

Last week a Lithuanian girl
Passed me near the Stockyards
On the way to a festival of her folk;
And yet I feast from her vanished eyes
On the light of a people
Waiting to tell its long dream,
And let its language be excuse enough
For the brother-wise;
A race, holding in its broken bowl
The coin of all the tongues—
The broil of all the races!

The rattling old trolley will yet
Run me into international debt.

A SQUANDERED DAY

I'm home again
With a squandered day to reckon for.

How can I squander a day
When another unrolls before it's slipped
The brimming morrow's lake of longings?
How can I be a spendthrift
Of life and joy, those two pearls
Which, through spending, self-divide
Into endless strings?

Days are Forevers in a single drop.
The dew rolls like a globuled sun
To set in infinity; So days
Roll into the eternal
Yet stay the perfect now.

O, day, that I have loved,
You are mine forever—
Can you be lost or squandered
When you in passing fair
Have poured your sap into my leafing aims?
Are you not an expanding thing like me?
Within our two breasts the same morning buds

To burst into another day.
So what is lost, when in gluttony
We taste, devour, dissipate
And squander each other?

When the evening drifts
Into the creeping dusk for both of us,
There in the dark together
We kiss the forehead of the Beautiful Forever,
And wake into a dream to know
We've never slept, and that Tomorrow
Never yet arrived
Out of the far land of Time.

When the curtain lifts again
Is it not simply you and I
Travelling home from our Yesterday?

THE STREET CAR ORPHAN

I can't ride the trolley
For me that is taboo.
Life has chosen me,
Given me privilege;
It has supplied me
With my own motor,
My own track,
My own gas.

Has not pork crowned me
And clothed me
And housed me
And husbanded me,
In an English mansion
On a windy new boulevard?

Has not rich, red beef blood
Given me my place—
And should I not be loyal?
And did not the architect
In purist nicety cap my rafters
And my gable frontage
With decorative blood-ripe buzzards
To watch daily and nightly
To keep me loyal?

O I can't ride the trolley
For me that is taboo!
I must keep away from folks
And stay sub-human
That I may be happy.

PARTING

The bud leaving the frond to uncurl,
The seed falling from the pod
To jubilantly rush into germination,
Can they outdistance the gulf of parting
Which I feel when I go to meet
The reefs of approval
And leave behind your keen love-sifting lance
Which opens the pod
That I may rush jubilantly too,
Into the fresh frosts
Which will pierce my coverings
And let me out?

BABY HOLDING A BASKET OF LILACS
(*Decoration Day*)

Hear the song
That sings to me out of the basket:
"I am Purple!
I have reigned supreme for centuries.
I have decked kings and flowers,
Grapes and plums with myself;
I have blinded the world with romance;
I have painted altar windows;
Blurred the sancity of love;
On drifts of heliotrope
I've elbowed palace balustrades;
Proud parrots of queens
Noised me on their wings;
Peacocks fanned me to the breeze;
I claim the eyes of every babe
I've decked with lapis jewelry;
And breast milk flowed with my thin tints
As I wrapped me round the mass imperially.

"I am Purple!
I have covered the spindle legs of potentates
While with my deep dyed lash
They kept the weak scattered;

I've tinged fine linen to drape martyr's limbs
And bandage goddess' eyes,
And none have dared to challenge me.

"Crowned am I with lilacs,
Laden with plums,
Swollen with grapes;
Bursting with myself—
Purple!"

But I looked again:
The dissolving picture filmed itself;
In the sheen of it I saw
The Purple split!
The red mob was born;
The robes of irony dropped
From the blue limbs of the martyr;
The flowers in the basket laughed back into the baby's eyes;
Birds seemed to nestle at his feet;
I saw islands bloom with flax
Growing fine linen to swaddle him.
The mob quieted as though it rested by a cradle;
The martyr laughed—it was reward enough—
Purple had become like snow.

The men and women on the trolley
Were all carrying blossoms, going together
To deck old tombs, and crumbling piles
And market pits,
With their lilac bunches.

WHEN I TURN MY BACK

When I turn my back on the urban
I go out into the frontiers of myself,
Toward the gardens and forests
That first bred me and branched me.

When I turn my back on the urban
I go out into the fastnesses of myself,
Toward the distances and the expanses
Where I am safe; where new reaches grow
That make me ready for earth and body.

When I turn my back on the urban
I am surpassed with myself,
And re-assimilated into the maw
Of the many to which I must return
With fresh wrestling-antenna.

SIMILITUDE

The moon hung floating
As though all the stars
Were hiving round their queen-bee,
And the purple parasol of heaven
Curved down over like a bee-hive
And shut us all in together.
The squirming human swarm
With its dubious gray stenches
Was feeling more restless
Than the one overhead.

Each group was darting
In its separate ways
Only the one above was silently listening
To the zum-zum-zum below.

No one saw the queer simile
Except the motor man and me—
For surely his eyes followed
The row of lights on either side
Till they led right up
To their starry doubles.
He could not have missed it.
I could swear he noted the parallel.

You've seen the pillars of the museum
Lead to star-crowned suicide
In the lagoon?

So we both drowned ourselves
In the watery blue
Of super-speculation.
At least I feel
That he followed me in this,
For he stamped on the bell impatiently
And it all faded.

GENESIS

As the bird
Looks at its new laid egg furtively,
And the mother
Rushes to the cradle, at awaking,
So yesterday's themes still fresh
With the albuminous pabulum
Of brain parturition and delivery,
Draw me with the curiosity of a boy
Looking at his new born brother.

Lines are living bodies
Conceived and craving nativity.

Birth is no mystery to him who has bred verses.

Motherhood is only mind,
And that's why men are poets most—
Snatching what they lack
Makes them so.

Woman's a poet organically
She brings forth similes of herself—
Of the race:
The deep pools of nurture
Must flow out through something,
So they choose breasts of women
And brains of men.

STILL WAITING

She sat near the back.
Traces had slipped into her face
That a Phidian dreamer had aimed
To sketch into marble;
Crowning her cheekbones
Were eyes that a Raphael glimpsed
When flooded with a madonna unrealizable.

All the whorling grains of desire
Through the wombs of centuries—
Yes, through the pleistocene vortexes
Of the inverse infinitudes,—
Had brought her about;
As many times had been made wrong combinations.

There she sat!
Life stopped to inhale
In astonishment!
That had arrived
Which all had waited for—
The outline of full bodily loveliness.
And I was there to realize it!
This top moment of time!

But she was unaware.
All of Time's ingrafted intimacies
Wasted!
The clamor of homing beauty
Before its locked cote!
Life's excuse for speeding up
Come to naught!

I felt myself once more journeying nowhere,
Cheated. So I stopped the car.

COMPOSITE

Choice, the alchemist conjures new potions
From blends too long kept separate
By caste and tongues and class.

Do you look down on her over there
Beneath the globulous shine
Of the overhead light?

The purples black of some far back
Grecian maid of the isles
Sleeps in her hair;

Forehead, laughing upward—broadening
Like moonlit waters in Tyrol fastnesses—
Leaves blue lakes for her eyes;

Wide brows—which the bland norseland
Curves to slow wonder, when too much sun
Turns daylight into mystery;

Irises—flashing out from behind
Some granddam's witching lashes
Lent by the fairies of an Irish wood;

Nose—fine and dubious, high tensioned,
Leading with frankish flavored accent
Each sweep of the head, like a prow;

Lips—which for some stern Norman
Spelled slowly from the Domesday book
His rights—here spelled self-possession only;

Cheeks—groomed where fresh winds
That puff in the cherry-riping Adria,
Splash their wild crimson on mating robins, too;

Head—with this face sit lightly
On the soft round pad between her shoulders,
Where loads rested as her sires climbed the Tatra;

Throat—carrying this nosegay
Plucked from the races,—
No wonder you swell with pride!

WIND BACK OF THE YARDS

They come thundering down the boulder pave-
ment
At me, into me,
These hammering, tearing winds,
Lugging with them human dust
And offal,—with their mixed in wealth of doings,—
Fertilizing the core
And plowing into life.

Breath of the whirlwind in me,
Where were you sown,
What will you reap?
Why must I be the windharp
For all these racial strains,
And the arranger of all these dissonants,
That a nascent people shall be laid
In harmonious folds
And quieted as the dust on a windless day?
And then must they go on and on
And work and work and weary and weary
And know nothing of the whirlwind that brought
them into form?

They come thundering down the streets
At me and over me and through me

These wearying streaming humans.
They do not know me.
Why should I suffer myself to be
The pavement over which they shall pass
Into realization,
While everyone about me sniffs
And calls them the slum, the pabel?
Why?
Because I loved them in their native fields,
And on sunny September days helped them cut
their grapes;
Drank goat's milk at their hearths;
Kissed their thin babies, knew their want
And their native wealth.
Here they vainly strain, lost in the wilderness
Of Civilization!

Let me go back with them
To their own kind of woe!

WILDBIRD ON THE WIRE

Oh bird—
How did you lose your way,
Winging above the city's moaning smudge?
Were you betrayed into the tangled wild of folk,
By the rows of maples in the park?
Or did the glistening buildings tunnelling the sky
Seem like cliffs or mountain peaks
With ledges of cool rest for tired wings?

Or did the early wax-work filigree
Of the unravelling morn
Mirage the city
Into a luring wilderness
That promised brooks and leafing nest crotches?

Or did you scent
The worm, the worm—
The worm that gnaws
At everything?

ROUND AND ROUND

So go, trolley wheels,
And let us ride upon you
And with you—now up, now down
Over and under and up again!
Are we not the cogs of your cogs?
The rims of your rims?
The reason for your rolling and arriving?

Roll, seasons, roll too;
Out of the lower frost lines
Into the higher fires—
Blazing with flowers! Blazing with us!

Go, winds, suck the mist basins!
Lift them into the mountain pockets
So the thirsty sun can resuck them
And throw them back into the overbrimming sea!
Twist and drift, oh winds,
In everlasting rounds,
Until you give back seasons and flowers again
To twist and drift through us!

Come birds, mate and go again;
Is not the longing for the perfect round of flight
In the oval of your egg

Maddening the spaces with elipses
For us to mate in, and fly in?

The plan is but a game
In the playground of periodicity.
Our naughtiness cannot thwart it
In its ever circling reiteration.
Maybe the unhappy ones are those
Who look for theirs outside this fixed swing.

The peace of States
The rhythm of the pooling races
Is in the little fact
That the round and round of each thing
Slips no cog—while above the wheels
The caravan smoothly rolls along its way.

TANTALUS

"My eyes, my eyes,
They are the great revealers!"
Cried the blindman
Just from under the knife.

But I who have always seen
Tell me,
Where shall I seek for mine?

"Love, love,
And bodily co-ordination,
This shall bring me unfoldment!"
Cries the woman
Breaking from the cage.

But I who have always
Swept through the vaulted abyss
Where shall I go heaven hunting?

THE BULL'S EYE

Even the palace has its farthest door
And even the cathedral its pinnacle
Quivering off into air waves.

Even the endlessly chugging trolley
Makes its final loop;
But see that wondering woman
On the front seat:
She has no target spot,
No point of sight,
No plumb,
No goal,
No arrival;
She has no nearer aim than the tangent of a comet;
And she is carrying a child.

THE OPTIMIST'S EGO

I do not feel me travelling these rails,
Elbowing the herd;
For have I not been chosen to be I?

Some great wise power pruned so well
Through the bloom of teeming life
That I am pleased with this I that I am.
It picked me a keen gray firey glance
To look out from the lifted mind
It clothed my Self with,
To glimpse all these vistas
That open before me as I ride.

Looking down into the cross-paths
I find the source of this Me that is I
(Which I adore);
I see the vistas of the mother-worlds
Bringing forth I's and I's
To finally fashion just this one
That fits my last and crown so perfectly.

As I press forward into the expanses
Down each passing avenue I look and see
The radiating rows of golden paths
Called for want of better names:—

Poetry, Art, Music—
Dawning into the sun-stream
Which happened to be just I;
Dressing the lambent fibers
Which threaded down the pattern into Me.
How perfectly they've come together;
What a choice revelry of dance
They carry on in Me. (Where are we passing?)
So that waking they crowd my longings,
And sleeping they people a world
That I may roam in glory-gleaming ways.
Often I meet John there
And match colors with him,
To prove that the heavenly streets he painted
Were but the poor thoroughfares of his day,
Compared with the endless crosslines
And the intricate composite alleys
That transport us into the glow world
Of the expanded I
Of my day.

THE RUNAWAY

Why should a stranger's light touch
Just skirting my sleeve
Roil up all my trilling affections
And set my heart bleating
And leave lingering quivers round my nostrils,
When I see he was only reaching to save
What he held dear, and missed,
Snatching me instead?

The team broke rein
And rushed by the car's exit
As we three emerged.
No one was hurt, except my fancy—
For I caught the whole action:
His swift leaping devotion,
His self-annihilating desire to save,
Was all lavished on me by mistake.
She would have taken it for granted, unmoved,
While I caught it, washed free from motive.

The tragedy of loss lay tunnelling gulfs before me;
Swift bridges spanned them;
Long reaches scaffolded themselves

That I might fly and take
What was my own—
Which had been freely offered.

Did he see the look pass over me?
Is that what made the man's face fall
As he stumbled back to the woman
At his left, sailing on in unconsciousness?

A great runaway is life.

PAIN IN TRANSIT

The drifting yellow leaves of the avenues
Rush ahead and beside our wheels;
They dance like brown-mad draperies
And blow through me the sure cry
Of autumnal quitting.

The east-west boulder-laid streets
With their sun risings and settings,
Balance the vistas with cloudy yellows at both ends;
And dead-leaf odors irrevocably whisper
Of autumnal quitting.

Where the brown avenues criss-cross
With the leaf-dammed east-west alleys,
I am teased and stumbled with dread
Of autumnal quitting.

REVIEWING IN TRANSIT

To M. B.

I am not a hum-drum human.
I am supping off white velvet saucers;
Flaming humming bird's wings
Carry to my lips
Rainbow salads, dressed with poppy oil;
But when I would taste their flashes
They fly off to my ears like choral spectrums;
When, alas, I would listen
To their swishing music,
They slip me and dazzle my glimpses
As sunglade mists
Might drench the peafowl's plumage.

I am vexed to tears
In a joyous chase—of lines,
For they fail me as wings,
They mislead me as words,
Blind me as visions,
And smother me as songs.

Come back, come back,
Say it all over again,
For I am not distraught—
I am but reading your first volume.

BACH'S MELODY FOR THE G STRING

Like a long breath
Which settles all,
It sends one wondering
Down a winding river path;
The blurred muttering of the water
Echoes through the rattle of the leaves;
Then over and over the bow dips
To the dull thrumming G
Of the twisted silver string.

The willow dips to the wave,
The wire soughs the under-toned current,
The wind sighs alto, while the wiley bow
Wriggles through a never ending air.

I, who can only sleep and go
And eat and worry; who can only
At sudden intervals
Rise above that dull G—
How you irritate me with that dipping
To what I would escape!

Let your teasings, up and down,
That would be jigs, go on and on,
But stop that dipping, Johan Sebastian!
Leave that to us who have no upper score;
Whose thoughts can never
'Scape the lisping alphabet
To wade out into the swallowing depth of tone
Where G is the molten oil of melody
And not the misery of a beached heart
That knows no ocean of song.

THAT SOMEONE

Would he enter at some unexpected corner—
That Someone,—who somewhere stole
Into the crooning world,
When dark silence challenged eye and ear—
When the far-fetched particles
Met in atomistic flight,
And clasped in fresh floods of flight
To fashion him?

Would he come—
That Someone—who should span and iridize the gulf
Between the earth and heaven, for me;
And charge the interspaces
Twixt soul and body for me?

The door opens. Is it he—
That Someone who shall sense the infinite calculus
Of the never ceasing pulse
Which carries life—can carries it to me?
That Someone whose lavish glance could throw
The worthwhile golden thread
Upon which these twitching pearls are strung,
Which make the next beat of my heart
Quite safe and longed for?

Should he come,—at Someone,
And be caught in the infinite mesh
My soul throws out,
And trembling fuse his affluence with mine—
'Twould start another spasm
In the earth and sea and sky
To match the flying grains
For another try at soul-building.

Fixed in a plastic continuity
Should that someone pour his full glass for me—
Would we realize each in each
A realm making for life without a blot or stop?

Can I be watching the door to catch
This vaguest shadow of the comrade-stuff
My human need must crave?
And should that Someone enter
Could I ever doubt again
The value of the poorest touch-point
Which two charged souls might stablish
And bring the spark—defying poet, priest and alchemist?

CONSTANCY

Some stars there be that fall
And some that stay;
Some days that are remembered
And some that will not pass—
That's my little life.

But the dumb hours
Shall sift into weeks
And the dripping years with constancy
Shall wear away the world
Till the waiting shadows swallow it—
I'll meet you there.

JUST AS LIEF

Beloved, shall I love you madly,
As in the high sun
The forest panther loves her young?

Or shall I love you sanely
As the coy pink of the grayish ball that was the
hot sun of noonday,
Pours its last glow over the disintegrating city?

Or shall I just flood about you, adding a haze,
To the majesty of the stupendous outline
In which you palpatantly swim?

Or shall I follow after, reflecting,
As does the lady moon,
In dry, dull, saffron, dusty, sultry yellow?

Choose, for I can do all or either:
Crush you or cozy you; flood you or reflect you;
For am I not a woman?

SILENCES

In the roar of the traffic
I feel myself engulfed in silence
Like the silence in the soul of a cannon.

Did you ever think
What an awful silence there must have been
Just after the world was clashed forth?

And if there was a roaring God-voice
Asking aught of it,
Has it answered to this day?

And then—
There is that other quenching silence
When adrift I ask:
"Whence came I and whither do I go?"

Nothing ever answers it,
And the asking voice
Dies not even to an echo's wasted form.

Upon the brink of these questioning silences
Must I ever skim along
Afloat in the drowning thunder of it all?

And this life that I love
Moves breathing all about me,
Waiting in hushed leash, holding back the answer.

Will the myriads that travel with me
Deafened to the same silences
Stifle even my question into stillness?

MOTORY

Flash, and the rush and fire
Flow through the living wire
Till they reach me—
Then rage under skin and flesh.

The herds of the swirling desire—
Through the overhead quivering wire
When I reach them,
I'll catch in the self-same mesh.

FRESH FIELDS

Let's play and feed
Upon the meadow,
The passing meadow that stretches
Through the royal town—
From end to end, the meadow of
Impervious lives that writhe
And graze and bloom and beat
Through the gray-greenish edges of the city.

I find it a veritable meadow
Full of refreshment,
Where my heart can stretch
And lave itself after unscrolling
From the cramp of self-fulfillment
And petty love;
And cool its hot flashes
In a wind that has blown itself chill
Through the gray-greenish edges of the city.

MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE

In Mark White Square
In folk song chorus they were singing:

Full-voiced, like saga-women
Might thunder prophesy:

And this singing foretold
A race of singers would be born,
Mixed from all the bloods that sing;

It would have a singing fatherland
And a singing mother tongue;
It would weave all the words
Of all the people
Into one song;

And queerest folk
In farthest valleys
Should feel the tug
Of this song.

And O, My Country, 'twas of you
These singers sang
This singing prophesy!

SCULPT

And the man said:
"Shall I go on and on
Gathering this raw material
Which the man-and-woman life
Has heaped for me,
And let high wrought sensibilities
Ravel me out into feelings
And heap them up with a fumbled handprint
Regretting?

"No, I have lived enough to draw on;
I have battered me a chisel into shape;
I will carve myself
Into a result for Art."

The man submitted his effort;
Then plastically stretched his arms,
And received the nails of technique
In his palms—all itching to sculp.

RIVALS

A pretty November day
Passed in crisp crinolin sunshine;
It was the eleventh of the family.

And a flaming red July day
Passed on the other side—
It was the fourth child of that family.

And the little chill day
Blushed hot in jealousy
For they knew each other's history.

HALSTED SILHOUETTE

Face against the pane—
Child's face,
Watching the flying pavements
Filled with flocking, scheming, gripping
Blocks and blocks
Of Folks and Things—
Two millstones to pinch that little face between.

Keep it close to the pane, baby;
Windows are everywhere,
So look busily through them.

The jam will move you on and along,
So gaze out and ahead
Ever—little face—
The poets are awaiting your seeings.

IMAGINATION AND TRAVEL

In the little home garden,
Before I knew the far-pathed world,
I gathered it out of the mists of distance,
Dragged its purple back to gray
And unpacked it into the golden space
Of my childhood; I toyed with its splendors
Its palaces and ruins,
As a boy might untangle
What's gathered in his pocket.

And I have since mused upon it all;
For the world, unravelled
Into my travel-weary eyes,
Has never seemed so real a world.

I find it but a scattered group
Of stone-piles, forests, stretches,
Cities flying past; and faces,
Faces, faces, faces, dubiously peering
From an edgeless sky.

NEW TO HIM

We were going home to the South Side
He ventured to read me some lines,
Bold precise arguments
Like a brief, presenting his own case
To the supreme court.
They told of the *new* life-line
Which he would fling to men;
They told of the *new democracy*
Which he had dared to dream;
They told in floods and torrents
That were over-flooding his own *debris*,
And finally running clear,
How a *new republic* shall arise.

He wrestled these arguments himself
With swelling biceps
And taut backbone.

I slapped him on the shoulder,
Figuratively, and under my breath
Said something like "Bully for you!"—
Not exactly that, for I am too much of a lady.
At any rate I gloried in him;
Not so young either, to be in such a fever
Of salvation jaundice.

We all had it younger.
It didn't seem to set us prattling
Half so much as it set us working.
It didn't make us sleek and successful,
It kept us ragged
And walking to save carfare.
It didn't make us the idol of a group,
It left us shunned
As though a slight madness
Had better not be encouraged.
It set us, not defying Time
To produce these *new* boys and girls
For this *new* order,
But to roll up sleeves and produce them ourselves.
It put some of us into the slime pits
In Leavenworth—something to write
And lecture about afterwards.
But, dear boy, keep the safe path;
Tell stories plastered to pages
In broken lines and aeroplaned expressions;
We need you—
For we are only the trolley track
And you the overhead wire, maybe.
The Conductor uses us both
To make the goal.

STAR DRAWN

Ride the sky, my vaulting steed,
Lashed abreast with fire and wind!
Wheel ahead,
With your nose on the thrill
That rushes
From the mother bed of the worlds
To carry
My worm to the stars.

VERILY, VERILY

O let me go out into the sun
Of tomorrow
As the moth flies for just a day!

O let me build into future palaces
For the comers,
As the evening red piles up good weather!

O let me sow red wheat kernels
For bread
Which I never will knead!

But the bat of yesterday is flying
In my lines
Always retracing, and echoing and concluding.

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